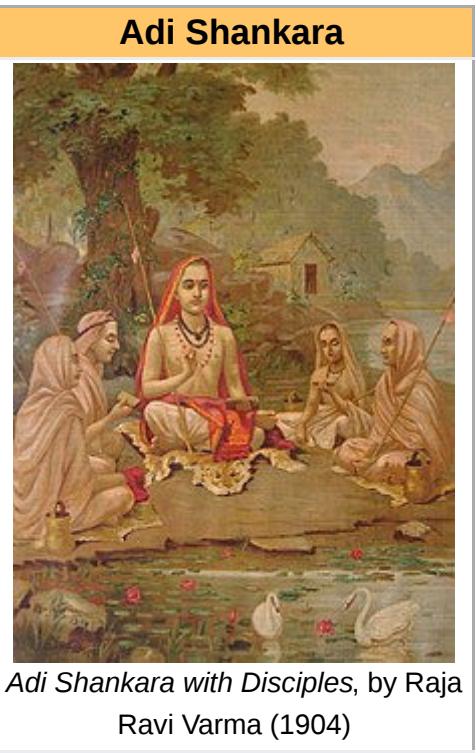


# Adi Shankara

Adi Shankara (pronounced [a:di ū̃kərə]) or Shankara, was an early 8th century Indian philosopher and theologian<sup>[2]</sup> who consolidated the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta.<sup>[1][3][note 1]</sup> He is credited with unifying and establishing the main currents of thought in Hinduism.<sup>[6][7][8]</sup>

His works in Sanskrit discuss the unity of the ātman and Nirguna Brahman "brahman without attributes"<sup>[9]</sup> He wrote copious commentaries on the Vedic canon (Brahma Sutras, Principal Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita) in support of his thesis.<sup>[10]</sup> His works elaborate on ideas found in the Upanishads. Shankara's publications criticised the ritually-oriented Mīmāṃsā school of Hinduism.<sup>[11]</sup> He also explained the key difference between Hinduism and Buddhism, stating that Hinduism asserts "Atman (Soul, Self) exists", while Buddhism asserts that there is "no Soul, no Self"<sup>[12][13][14]</sup>

Shankara travelled across the Indian subcontinent to propagate his philosophy through discourses and debates with other thinkers. He established the importance of monastic life as sanctioned in the Upanishads and Brahma Sutra, in a time when the Mīmāṃsā school established strict ritualism and ridiculed monasticism. He is reputed to have founded four mathas ("monasteries"), which helped in the historical development, revival and spread of Advaita Vedanta of which he is known as the greatest revivalist.<sup>[15]</sup> Adi Shankara is believed to be the organiser of the Dashanami monastic order and unified the Shanmata tradition of worship. He is also known as Adi Shankaracharya, Shankara Bhagavatpada, sometimes spelled as Sankaracharya, (Ādi) Śaṅkarācārya, Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda and Śaṅkara Bhagavatpādācārya



Adi Shankara with Disciples, by Raja Ravi Varma (1904)

<b>Religion</b>	Hinduism
<b>Founder of</b>	Dashanami Sampradaya Advaita Vedanta
<b>Philosophy</b>	Advaita Vedanta
<b>Known for</b>	Expounded Advaita Vedanta
<b>Personal</b>	
<b>Nationality</b>	Indian
<b>Born</b>	Shankara 788 CE <sup>[1]</sup> Kaladi present day Kerala, India
<b>Died</b>	820 CE <sup>[1]</sup> (aged 32) Kedarnath present day Uttarakhand, India
<b>Guru</b>	Govinda Bhagavatpada
<b>Honors</b>	Jagadguru

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# **Biography**

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## **Sources**

There are at least fourteen different known biographies of Adi Shankara's life.<sup>[16]</sup> Many of these are called the *Sankara Vijaya*, while some are called *Guruvijaya*, *Sankarabhyudaya* and *Shankaracaryacarita*. Of these, the *Brhat-Sankara-Vijaya* by Citsukha is the oldest hagiography but only available in excerpts, while *Sankaradigvijaya* by Vidyaranya and *Sankaravijaya* by Anandagiri are the most cited.<sup>[16][17]</sup> Other significant biographies are the *Mādhavīya Śaṅkara Vijayam* (of Mādhava, c. 14th century), the *Cidvilāsiya Śaṅkara Vijayam* (of Cidvilāsa, c. between the 15th and 17th centuries), and the *Keralīya Śaṅkara Vijayam* (of the Kerala region, extant from c. the 17th century).<sup>[18][19]</sup> These, as well as other biographical works on Shankara, were written many centuries to a thousand years after Shankara's death,<sup>[20]</sup> in Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit languages, and the biographies are filled with legends and fiction, often mutually contradictory.<sup>[16][21]</sup>

Scholars note that one of the most cited Shankara hagiography by Anandagiri includes stories and legends about historically different people, but all bearing the same name of Sri Shankaracarya or also referred to as Shankara but likely meaning more ancient scholars with names such as Vidya-sankara, Sankara-misra and Sankara-nanda.<sup>[17]</sup> Some biographies are probably forgeries by those who sought to create a historical basis for their rituals or theories.<sup>[17][20]</sup>

Adi Shankara died in the thirty third year of his life,<sup>[22]</sup> and reliable information on his actual life is scanty.<sup>[17]</sup>

## **Birth-dates**

The Sringeri records state that Shankara was born in the 14th year of the reign of "VikramAditya", but it is unclear as to which king this name refers.<sup>[23]</sup> Though some researchers identify the name with *Chandragupta II* (4th century CE), modern scholarship accepts the VikramAditya as being from the *Chalukya dynasty of Badami*, most likely *Vikramaditya II* (733–746 CE).<sup>[23]</sup>

Several different dates have been proposed for Shankara.<sup>[22]</sup>

- 509–477 BCE: This dating, is based on records of the heads of the Shankara's cardinal institutions Mathas at Dvaraka Pitha, the Govardhana matha and Badri and the Kanchi Peetham.<sup>[24]</sup> This conforms to the chronology calculated based off the Hindu Puranas.<sup>[5][25]</sup>



The birthplace of Adi Shankara at Kalady

- 44–12 BCE: the commentator Anandagiri believed he was born at Chidambaram in 44 BCE and died in 12 BCE.<sup>[1]</sup>
- 6th century CE: Telang placed him in this century. Sir R. G. Bhandarkar believed he was born in 680 CE.<sup>[4]</sup>
- 788–820 CE: This was proposed by early 20th scholars and was customarily accepted by scholars such as Max Müller, Macdonnel, Pathok, Deussen and Radhakrishna.<sup>[4]</sup> and others.<sup>[26][27]</sup> The date 788–820 is also among those considered acceptable by Swami Tapasyananda, though he raises a number of questions.<sup>[28]</sup>
- sometime between 700–750 CE: late 20th-century scholarship has questioned the 788–820 CE dates, placing Adi Shankara's life of 32 years in the first half of the 8th century.<sup>[29][30]</sup>
- 805–897 CE: Venkiteswara not only places Shankara later than most, but also had the opinion that it would not have been possible for him to have achieved all the works apportioned to him, and has him live ninety two years.<sup>[4]</sup>

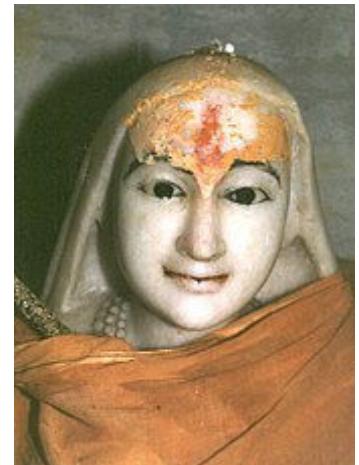
The popularly accepted dating places Adi Shankara to be a scholar from the first half of the 8th century CE.<sup>[3][16]</sup>

## Life

Shankara was most likely born in the southern Indian state of Kerala, according to the oldest biographies in a village named Kaladi<sup>[31][16]</sup> sometimes spelled as Kalati or Karati,<sup>[32][33]</sup> but some texts suggest the birthplace to be Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu.<sup>[17][34]</sup> His father died while Shankara was very young.<sup>[16]</sup> Shankara's upanayanam, the initiation into student-life, had to be delayed due to the death of his father and was then performed by his mother.<sup>[35]</sup>

Shankara's hagiography describe him as someone who was attracted to the life of Sannyasa (hermit) from early childhood. His mother disapproved. A story, found in all hagiographies, describe Shankara at age eight going to a river with his mother, Sivataraka, to bathe, and where he is caught by a crocodile.<sup>[36]</sup> Shankara called out to his mother to give him permission to become a Sannyasin or else the crocodile will kill him. The mother agrees, Shankara is freed and leaves his home for education. He reaches a Saivite sanctuary along a river in a north-central state of India, and becomes the disciple of a teacher named Govinda Bhagavatpada<sup>[36][37]</sup> The stories in various hagiographies diverge in details about the first meeting between Shankara and his Guru, where they met, as well as what happened later.<sup>[36]</sup> Several texts suggest Shankara schooling with Govindapada happened along the river Narmada in Omkareshwar; a few place it along river Ganges in Kashi (Varanasi) as well as Badari (Badrinath in the Himalayas).<sup>[37]</sup>

The biographies vary in their description of where he went, who he met and debated and many other details of his life. Most mention Shankara studying the Vedas, Upanishads and Brahmasutra with Govindapada, and Shankara authoring several key works in his youth, while he was studying with his teacher.<sup>[38]</sup> It is with his teacher Govinda, that Shankara studied Gaudapadiya Karika, as Govinda was himself taught by Gaudapada.<sup>[16]</sup> Most also mention a meeting with scholars of the Mimamsa school of Hinduism namely Kumarila and Prabhakara, as well as Mandana and various Buddhists, in Shastrarth (an Indian tradition of public philosophical debates attended by large number of people, sometimes with royalty).<sup>[37]</sup> Thereafter, the biographies about Shankara vary significantly. Different and widely inconsistent accounts of his life include diverse journeys, pilgrimages, public debates, installation of yantras and lingas, as well as the founding of monastic centers in north, east, west and south India.<sup>[17][37]</sup>



Idol of Adi Shankara at his Samadhi Mandir, behind Kedarnath Temple, in Kedarnath, India



Murti of Adi Shankara at the SAT Temple in Santa Cruz, California

## Philosophical tour and disciples

While the details and chronology vary, most biographies mention Adi Shankara traveling widely within India, Gujarat to Bengal, and participating in public philosophical debates with different orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy, as well as heterodox traditions such as Buddhists, Jains, Arhatas, Saugatas, and Carvakas.<sup>[39]</sup> During his tours, he is credited with starting several Matha (monasteries), however this is uncertain.<sup>[39]</sup> Ten monastic orders in different parts of India are generally attributed to Shankara's

travel-inspired *Sannyasin* schools, each with Advaita notions, of which four have continued in his tradition: Bharati (Sringeri), Sarasvati (Kanchi), Tirtha and Asramin (Dvaraka).<sup>[40]</sup> Other monasteries that record Shankara's visit include Giri, Puri, Vana, Aranya, Parvata and Sagara – all names traceable to Ashrama system in Hinduism and Vedic literature.<sup>[40]</sup>

Adi Shankara had a number of disciple scholars during his travels, including Padmapada (also called Sanandana, associated with the text *Atma-bodha*), Suresvara, Tothaka, Citsukha, Prthividhara, Cidvilasayati, Bodhendra, Braharendra, Sadananda and others, who authored their own literature on Shankara and Advaita Vedanta.<sup>[39][41]</sup>

## Death

Adi Sankara is believed to have died aged 32, at Kedarnath in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand, a Hindu pilgrimage site in the Himalayas.<sup>[40][42]</sup> Some texts locate his death in alternate locations such as Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu) and somewhere in the state of Kerala.<sup>[37]</sup>

## Works

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Adi Shankara's works are the foundation of Advaita Vedanta school of Hinduism, and his doctrine, states Sengaku Mayeda, "has been the source from which the main currents of modern Indian thought are derived".<sup>[42]</sup> Over 300 texts are attributed to his name, including commentaries (*Bhāṣya*), original philosophical expositions (*Prakarana grantha*) and poetry (*Stotra*).<sup>[42][43]</sup> However most of these are not authentic works of Adi Shankara and are likely to be works of his admirers or scholars whose name was also Shankaracharya.<sup>[44][45]</sup> Piantelli has published a complete list of works attributed to Adi Sankara, along with issues of authenticity for most.<sup>[46]</sup>

### Authentic works

Adi Shankara is most known for his systematic reviews and commentaries (*Bhāsyas*) on ancient Indian texts. Shankara's masterpiece of commentary is the *Brahmasutrabhāṣya* (literally, commentary on Brahma Sutra), a fundamental text of the Vedanta school of Hinduism.<sup>[42]</sup>

His commentaries on ten Mukhya (principal) Upanishads are also considered authentic by scholars,<sup>[42][44]</sup> and these are: *Bhāṣya* on the Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, the Chandogya Upaniṣad, the Aitareya Upaniṣad, the Taittiriya Upaniṣad, the Kena Upaniṣad,<sup>[47]</sup> the Isha Upaniṣad, the Katha Upaniṣad, the Mundaka Upaniṣad, the Prashna Upaniṣad, and the Mandukya Upaniṣad.<sup>[48][49]</sup> Of these, the commentary on Mandukya, is actually a commentary on Madukya-Karikas by Gaudapada.<sup>[49]</sup>

Other authentic works of Shankara include commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita (part of his Prasthana Traya Bhāṣya).<sup>[50]</sup> His Vivarana (tertiary notes) on the commentary by Yādavīśvara on Yoga Sūtras as well as those on Apastamba Dharmasūtras (Ādhyatama-patala-bhāṣya) are accepted by scholars as authentic works of Adi Shankara.<sup>[48][51]</sup> Among the *Stotra* (poetic works), the Daksinamurti Stotra, the Bhajagovinda Stotra, the Sivanandalahari, the Carpata-panjarika, the Visnu-satpadi, the Harimide, the Dasa-shloki, and the Krishna-staka are likely to be authentic.<sup>[48][52]</sup>

Shankara also authored Upadesasahasri, his most important original philosophical work.<sup>[51][53]</sup> Of other original *Prakaranas* (प्रकरण, monographs, treatise), seventy six works are attributed to Adi Shankara. Modern era Indian scholars such as Belvalkar as well as Upadhyaya accept five and thirty nine works respectively as authentic.<sup>[54]</sup>

Shankara's stotras considered authentic include those dedicated to Krishna (Vaishnavism) and one to Shiva (Shaivism) – often considered two different sects within Hinduism. Scholars suggest that these *stotra* are not sectarian, but essentially Advaitic and reach for a unified universal view of Vedanta.<sup>[52]</sup>

Adi Shankara's commentary on the Brahma Sutras is the oldest surviving. However, in that commentary, he mentions older commentaries like those of Dravida, Bhartrprapancha and others which are either lost or yet to be found.<sup>[55]</sup>

## Works of doubtful authenticity or not authentic

Commentaries on Nrisimha-Purvatapaniya and Shveshvataro Upanishads are attributed to Adi Shankara, but their authenticity is highly doubtful.<sup>[44][49][56]</sup> Similarly, commentaries on several early and later Upanishads attributed to Shankara are rejected by scholars<sup>[57]</sup> to be his works, and are likely works of later scholars; these include: Kaushitaki Upanishad, Maitri Upanishad, Kaivalya Upanishad, Paramahamsa Upanishad, Sakatayana Upanishad, Mandala Brahmana Upanishad, Maha Narayana Upanishad, Gopalatapaniya Upanishad. However, in Brahmasutra-Bhasya, Shankara cites some of these Upanishads as he develops his arguments, but the historical notes left by his companions and disciples, along with major differences in style and the content of the commentaries on later Upanishad have led scholars to conclude that the commentaries on later Upanishads were not Shankara's work.<sup>[49]</sup>

The authenticity of Shankara being the author of Vivekacūḍāmaṇi<sup>[58]</sup> has been questioned, but scholars generally credit it to him.<sup>[59]</sup>

*Aparoksha Anubuti* and *Atmabodha* are also attributed to Shankara, as his original philosophical treatises, but this is doubtful. Paul Hacker has also expressed some reservations that the compendium *Sarva-darsana-siddhanta Sangraha* was completely authored by Shankara, because of difference in style and thematic inconsistencies in parts.<sup>[57]</sup> Similarly, *Gayatri-bhasya* is doubtful to be Shankara's work.<sup>[49]</sup> Other commentaries that are highly unlikely to be Shankara's work include those on *Uttaragita*, *Siva-gita*, *Brahma-gita*, *Lalita-shasranama*, *Suta-samhita* and *Sandhya-bhasya*. The commentary on the Tantric work *Lalita-trisati-bhasya* attributed to Adi Shankara is also unauthentic.<sup>[49]</sup>

Adi Shankara is also widely credited with commentaries on other scriptural works, such as the Vishnu sahasranāma and the Sānatsujātiya,<sup>[60]</sup> but both these are considered apocryphal by scholars who have expressed doubts.<sup>[49]</sup> *Hastamalakiya-bhasya* is also widely believed in India to be Shankara's work and it is included in *Samata*-edition of Shankara's works, but some scholars consider it to be the work of Shankara's student.<sup>[49]</sup>

## Themes

Using ideas in ancient Indian texts, Shankara systematized the foundation for Advaita Vedanta in 8th century CE, one of the six orthodox schools of Hinduism founded many centuries earlier by Badarayana.<sup>[53]</sup> His thematic focus extended beyond metaphysics and soteriology, and he laid a strong emphasis on Pramanas, that is epistemology or "means to gain knowledge, reasoning methods that empower one to gain reliable knowledge". Rambachan, for example, summarizes the widely held view on one aspect of Shankara's epistemology before critiquing it as follows,

According to these [widely represented contemporary] studies, Shankara only accorded a provisional validity to the knowledge gained by inquiry into the words of the Śruti (Vedas) and did not see the latter as the unique source (*pramana*) of *Brahmajnana*. The affirmations of the Śruti, it is argued, need to be verified and confirmed by the knowledge gained through direct experience (*anubhava*) and the authority of the Śruti, therefore, is only secondary

— Anantanand Rambachan<sup>[50]</sup>

Sengaku Mayeda concurs, adding Shankara maintained the need for objectivity in the process of gaining knowledge (*vastutantra*), and considered subjective opinions (*puruṣatantra*) and injunctions in Śruti (*codenatantra*) as secondary. Mayeda cites Shankara's explicit statements emphasizing epistemology (*pramana-janya*) in section 1.18.133 of *Upadesasahasri*<sup>[61]</sup> and section 1.1.4 of *Brahmasutra-bhasya*.<sup>[62][63]</sup> According to Michael Comans, Adi Shankara considered perception and inference as primary most reliable epistemic means, and where these means to knowledge help one gain "what is beneficial and to avoid what is harmful", there is no need for or wisdom in referring to the scriptures.<sup>[64]</sup> In certain matters related to metaphysics and ethics, says Shankara, the testimony and wisdom in scriptures such as the Udas and the Upanishads become important.<sup>[65]</sup>

Adi Shankara cautioned against cherrypicking a phrase or verse out of context from Vedic literature, and remarks in the opening chapter of his *Brahmasutra-Bhasya* that the *Anvaya* (theme or purport) of any treatise can only be correctly understood if one attends to the *Samanyat Tatparya Linga*, that is six characteristics of the text under consideration: (1) the common in *Upakrama* (introductory statement) and *Upasamhara* (conclusions); (2) *Abhyasa* (message repeated); (3) *Apurvata* (unique proposition or

novelty); (4) *Phala* (fruit or result derived); (5) *Arthavada* (explained meaning, praised point) and (6) *Yukti* (verifiable reasoning).<sup>[66][67]</sup> While this methodology has roots in the theoretical works of Nyaya school of Hinduism, Shankara consolidated and applied it with his unique exegetical method called *Anvaya-Vyatireka*, which states that for proper understanding one must "accept only meanings that are compatible with all characteristics" and "exclude meanings that are incompatible with any".<sup>[68][69]</sup>

Hacker and Phillips note that this insight into rules of reasoning and hierarchical emphasis on epistemic steps is "doubtlessly the suggestion" of Shankara in *Brahma-sutra*, an insight that flowers in the works of his companion and disciple Padmapada.<sup>[70]</sup> Merrell-Wolff states that Shankara accepts Vedas and Upanishads as a source of knowledge as he develops his philosophical theses, yet he never rests his case on the ancient texts, rather proves each thesis, point by point using *pramanas* (epistemology), reason and experience.<sup>[71][72]</sup>

Adi Shankara, in his text *Upadesasahasri*, discourages ritual worship such as oblations to *Deva* (God), because that assumes the Self within is different from the Brahman.<sup>[73]</sup> The "doctrine of difference" is wrong, asserts Shankara, because, "he who knows the Brahman is one and he is another, does not know Brahman".<sup>[74][75]</sup> However, Shankara also asserts that Self-knowledge is realized when one's mind is purified by an ethical life that observes Yamas such as *Ahimsa* (non-injury, non-violence to others in body, mind and thoughts) and Niyamas. Rituals and rites such as *yajna* (a fire ritual), asserts Shankara, can help draw and prepare the mind for the journey to Self-knowledge.<sup>[76]</sup> He emphasizes the need for ethics such as Akrodha and Yamas during Brahmacharya, stating the lack of ethics as causes that prevent students from attaining knowledge.<sup>[76][77]</sup>

Adi Shankara has been varyingly called as influenced by Shaivism and Shaktism. However, his works and philosophy suggest greater overlap with Vaishnavism, influence of Yoga school of Hinduism, but most distinctly his Advaitin convictions with a monistic view of spirituality.<sup>[16][53][78]</sup>

## Philosophy and practice

### Knowledge of Brahman

Adi Shankara systematised the works of preceding philosophers.<sup>[81]</sup> His system marks a turn from realism to idealism.<sup>[82][83]</sup> His Advaita ("non-dualism") interpretation of the *sruti* postulates the identity of the Self (Atman) and the Whole (Brahman).<sup>[note 3]</sup> According to Adi Shankara, the one unchanging entity (Brahman) alone is real, while changing entities do not have absolute existence. The key source texts for this interpretation, as for all schools of *Vedānta*, are the Prasthanatrayi—the canonical texts consisting of the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras.

### Practice

Advaita Vedanta is based on *śāstra* ("scriptures"), *yukti* ("reason") and *anubhava* ("experiential knowledge"), and aided by *karmas* ("spiritual practices").<sup>[84]</sup>

Starting from childhood, when learning has to start, the philosophy has to be a way of life. Shankara's primary objective was to

#### Atma Shatkam (The song of the Self):

I am Consciousness, I am Bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.<sup>[note 2]</sup>

Without hate, without infatuation, without craving, without greed;  
Neither arrogance, nor conceit, never jealous I am;  
Neither *dharma*, nor *artha*, neither *kama*, nor *moksha* am I;  
I am Consciousness, I am Bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

Without sins, without merits, without elation, without sorrow;  
Neither mantra, nor rituals, neither pilgrimage, nor *Vdas*;  
Neither the experient, nor experienced, nor the experience am I,  
I am Consciousness, I am Bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

Without fear, without death, without discrimination, without caste;  
Neither father, nor mother, never born I am;  
Neither kith, nor kin, neither teacher nor student am I;  
I am Consciousness, I am Bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

Without form, without figure, without resemblance am I;  
Vitality of all senses, in everything I am;  
Neither attached, nor released am I;

I am Consciousness, I am Bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

—Adi Shankara, Nirvana Shatakam, Hymns 3–6<sup>[80]</sup>

understand and explain how moksha is achievable in this life, what it means to be liberated, free and a Jivanmukta.<sup>[53]</sup> His philosophical thesis was that jivanmukti is self-realization, the awareness of Oneness of Self and the Universal Spirit called Brahman.<sup>[53]</sup>

Shankara considered the purity and steadiness of mind achieved in Yoga as an aid to gaining moksha knowledge, but such yogic state of mind cannot in itself give rise to such knowledge.<sup>[85]</sup> To Shankara, that knowledge of Brahman springs only from inquiry into the teachings of the Upanishads.<sup>[86]</sup> The method of yoga, encouraged in Shankara's teachings notes Michael Comans, includes withdrawal of mind from sense objects as in Patanjali's system, but it is not complete thought suppression, instead it is a "meditative exercise of withdrawal from the particular and identification with the universal, leading to contemplation of oneself as the most universal, namely, Consciousness".<sup>[87]</sup> Shankara rejected those yoga system variations that suggest complete thought suppression leads to liberation, as well the view that the Shrutis teach liberation as something apart from the knowledge of the oneness of the Self. Knowledge alone and insights relating to true nature of things, taught Shankara, is what liberates. He placed great emphasis on the study of the Upanisads, emphasizing them as necessary and sufficient means to gain Self-liberating knowledge. Sankara also emphasized the need for and the role of Guru (Acharya, teacher) for such knowledge.<sup>[87]</sup>

## Shankara's Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism

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Shankara's Vedanta shows similarities with Mahayana Buddhism; opponents have even accused Shankara of being a "crypto-Buddhist," a qualification which is rejected by the Advaita Vedanta tradition, given the differences between these two schools. According to Shankara, a major difference between Advaita and Mahayana Buddhism are their views on Atman and Brahman.<sup>[88]</sup> According to both Loy and Jayatilleke, more differences can be discerned.<sup>[89][90]</sup>

## Differences

### Atman

According to Shankara, Hinduism believes in the existence of Atman, while Buddhism denies this.<sup>[91]</sup> Shankara citing Katha Upanishad asserted<sup>[13]</sup> that the Hindu Upanishad starts with stating its objective as

... this is the investigation whether after the death of man the soul exists; some assert the soul exists; the soul does not exist, assert others." At the end, states Shankara, the same Upanishad concludes with the words, "it exists".<sup>[92]</sup>

Buddhists and Lokayatas, wrote Shankara, assert that soul does not exist.<sup>[12][note 4]</sup>

There are also differences in the understanding of what "liberation" means. Nirvana, a term more often used in Buddhism, is the liberating realization and acceptance that there is no Self (anatman). Moksha, a term more common in Hinduism, is liberating realization and acceptance of Self and Universal Soul, the consciousness of one's Oneness with all existence and understanding the whole universe as the Self.<sup>[89][93]</sup>

### Logic versus revelation

Stcherbatsky in 1927 criticized Shankara for demanding the use of logic from Madhyamika Buddhists, while himself resorting to revelation as a source of knowledge.<sup>[94][note 5]</sup> Sircar in 1933 offered a different perspective and stated, "Sankara recognizes the value of the law of contrariety and self-alienation from the standpoint of idealistic logic; and it has consequently been possible for him to integrate appearance with reality".<sup>[95]</sup>

Recent scholarship states that Shankara's arguments on revelation are about *apta vacana* (Sanskrit: आप्तवचनं, sayings of the wise, relying on word, testimony of past or present reliable experts).<sup>[96][97]</sup> It is part of his and Advaita Vedanta's epistemological foundation.<sup>[96]</sup> Advaita Vedanta school considers such testimony epistemically valid asserting that a human being needs to know numerous facts, and with the limited time and energy available, he can learn only a fraction of those facts and truths directly.<sup>[98]</sup>

Shankara considered the teachings in the Vedas and Upanishads as *apta vacana* and a valid source of knowledge.<sup>[96]</sup> He suggests the importance of teacher-disciple relationship on combining logic and revelation to attain moksha in his text Upadeshasahasri.<sup>[99]</sup> Rambachan and others state Shankara methodology did not rely exclusively on Vedic statements, but included a range of logical methods, reasoning methodology and pramanas.<sup>[100][101]</sup>

## Similarities

Despite Adi Shankara's criticism of certain schools of Mahayana Buddhism, Shankara's philosophy shows strong similarities with the Mahayana Buddhist philosophy which he attacks.<sup>[94]</sup> According to S.N. Dasgupta,

Shankara and his followers borrowed much of their dialectic form of criticism from the Buddhists. His Brahman was very much like the sunya of Nagarjuna [...] The debts of Shankara to the self-luminosity of the Vijnanavada Buddhism can hardly be overestimated. There seems to be much truth in the accusations against Shankara by Vijnana Bhiksu and others that he was a hidden Buddhist himself. I am led to think that Shankara's philosophy is largely a compound of Vijnanavada and Sunyavada Buddhism with the Upanisad notion of the permanence of self superadded.<sup>[102]</sup>

According to Mudgal, Shankara's Advaita and the Buddhist Madhyamaka view of ultimate reality is compatible because they are both transcendental, indescribable, non-dual and only arrived at through via negativa (neti neti). Mudgal concludes therefore that

... the difference between Sunyavada (Mahayana) philosophy of Buddhism and Advaita philosophy of Hinduism may be a matter of emphasis, not of kind.<sup>[103]</sup>

## Historical and cultural impact

### Historical context

Shankara lived in the time of the so-called "Late classical Hinduism",<sup>[104]</sup> which lasted from 650 till 1100 CE.<sup>[104]</sup> This era was one of political instability that followed Gupta dynasty and King Harsha of the 7th century CE.<sup>[105]</sup> It was a time of social and cultural change as the ideas of Buddhism, Jainism and various traditions within Hinduism were competing for members.<sup>[106][107]</sup> Buddhism in particular had emerged as a powerful influence in India's spiritual traditions in the first 700 years of the 1st millennium CE.<sup>[105][108]</sup> Shankara, and his contemporaries, made a significant contribution in understanding Buddhism and the ancient Vedic traditions, then transforming the extant ideas, particularly reforming the Vedanta tradition of Hinduism, making it India's most important tradition for more than a thousand years!<sup>[105]</sup>

### Influence on Hinduism

Shankara has an unparalleled status in the tradition of Advaita Vedanta. He travelled all over India to help restore the study of the Vedas.<sup>[109]</sup> His teachings and tradition form the basis of Smartism and have influenced Sant Mat lineages.<sup>[110]</sup>

He introduced the Pañcāyatana form of worship, the simultaneous worship of five deities – Ganesha, Surya, Vishnu, Shiva and Devi. Shankara explained that all deities were but different forms of the one Brahman, the invisible Supreme Being.<sup>[111]</sup>



Adi Sankara Keerthi Sthampa  
Mandapam, Kalady Kerala

Benedict Ashley credits Adi Shankara for unifying two seemingly disparate philosophical doctrines in Hinduism, namely Atman and Brahman.<sup>[112]</sup> Isaeva states Shankara's influence included reforming Hinduism, founding monasteries, edifying disciples, disputing opponents and engaging in philosophic activity that, in the eyes of Indian tradition, help revive "the orthodox idea of the unity of all beings" and Vedanta thought.<sup>[113]</sup>

Prior to Shankara, views similar to his already existed, but did not occupy a dominant position within the Vedanta.<sup>[114]</sup> Nakamura states that the early Vedanta scholars were from the upper classes of society, well-educated in traditional culture. They formed a social elite, "sharply distinguished from the general practitioners and theologians of Hinduism."<sup>[115]</sup> Their teachings were "transmitted among a small number of selected intellectuals".<sup>[115]</sup> Works of the early Vedanta schools do not contain references to Vishnu or Shiva.<sup>[116]</sup> It was only after Shankara that "the theologians of the various sects of Hinduism utilized Vedanta philosophy to a greater or lesser degree to form the basis of their doctrines,"<sup>[117]</sup> while the Nath-tradition established by him, led "its theoretical influence upon the whole of Indian society became final and definitive.<sup>[115][118]</sup>

## Critical assessment

Some scholars doubt Shankara's early influence in India.<sup>[119]</sup> The Buddhist scholar Richard E. King states,

Although it is common to find Western scholars and Hindus arguing that Sankaracarya was the most influential and important figure in the history of Hindu intellectual thought, this does not seem to be justified by the historical evidence.<sup>[120]</sup>

According to King and Roodurmun, until the 10th century Shankara was overshadowed by his older contemporary Mandana-Misra, the latter considered to be the major representative of Advaita.<sup>[121][122]</sup> Other scholars state that the historical records for this period are unclear, and little reliable information is known about the various contemporaries and disciples of Shankara.<sup>[123]</sup> For example, Advaita tradition holds that Mandana-Misra is the same person as Suresvara, a name he adopted after he became a disciple of Shankara after a public debate which Shankara won.<sup>[124][125]</sup>

Some scholars state that Māṇḍana-Miśra and Sureśvara must have been two different scholars, because their scholarship is quite different.<sup>[126][124]</sup> Other scholars, on the other hand, state that Mandana-Misra and Shankara do share views, because both emphasize that Brahman-Atman can not be directly perceived, rather it is discovered and defined through elimination of division (duality) of any kind.<sup>[127][123]</sup> The Self-realization (Soul-knowledge), suggest both Mandana Misra and Shankara, can be described cataphatically (positive liberation, freedom through knowledge, jivanmukti moksha) as well as apophatically (removal of ignorance, negation of duality, negation of division between people or souls or spirit-matter).<sup>[127]</sup> While both share core premises, states Isaeva, they differ in several ways, with Mandana Misra holding Vedic knowledge as an absolute and end in itself, while Shankara holds Vedic knowledge and all religious rites as subsidiary and means to the human longing for "liberation, freedom and moksha".<sup>[127]</sup>

Several scholars suggest that the historical fame and cultural influence of Shankara grew centuries later, particularly during the era of Muslim invasions and consequent devastation of India.<sup>[119][128]</sup> Many of Shankara's biographies were created and published in and after 14th century, such as the widely cited Vidyaranya's Śankara-vijaya. Vidyaranya, also known as Madhava, who was the 12th Jagadguru of the Śringeri Śāradā Pīṭham from 1380 to 1386,<sup>[129]</sup> inspired the re-creation of the Hindu Vijayanagara Empire of South India in response to the devastation caused by the Islamic Delhi Sultanate.<sup>[128][130]</sup> He and his brothers, suggest Paul Hacker and other scholars,<sup>[119][128]</sup> wrote about Śankara as well as extensive Advaitic commentaries on Vedas and Dharma. Vidyaranya was a minister in Vijayanagara Empire and enjoyed royal support,<sup>[130]</sup> and his sponsorship and methodical efforts helped establish Shankara as a rallying symbol of values, and helped spread historical and cultural influence of Shankara's Vedanta philosophies. Vidyaranya also helped establish monasteries (*mathas*) to expand the cultural influence of Shankara.<sup>[119]</sup> It may be these circumstances, suggest scholars,<sup>[131]</sup> that grew and credited Adi Shankara for various Hindu festive traditions such as the Kumbh Mela – one of the world's largest periodic religious pilgrimages.<sup>[132]</sup>

## Mathas

Shankara is regarded as the founder of the Daśanāmi Sampradāya of Hindu monasticism and Śaṅmata of Smarta tradition. He unified the theistic sects into a common framework of Shanmata system.<sup>[133]</sup> Advaita Vedanta is, at least in the west, primarily known as a philosophical system. But it is also a tradition of renunciation. Philosophy and renunciation are closely related.<sup>[web 1]</sup>

Most of the notable authors in the advaita tradition were members of the sannyasa tradition, and both sides of the tradition share the same values, attitudes and metaphysics.<sup>[web 1]</sup>



(Vidyashankara temple) at Sringeri Sharada Peetham, Shringeri

Shankara, himself considered to be an incarnation of Shiva,<sup>[web 1]</sup> established the Dashanami Sampradaya, organizing a section of the Ekadandi monks under an umbrella grouping of ten names.<sup>[web 1]</sup> Several other Hindu monastic and Ekadandi traditions remained outside the organisation of the Dasanāmis.<sup>[134][135]</sup>

Adi Sankara organised the Hindu monks of these ten sects or names under four Mathas (Sanskrit: मठ) (monasteries), with the headquarters at Dvārakā in the West, Jagannatha Puri in the East, Sringeri in the South and Badrikashrama in the North.<sup>[web 1]</sup> Each math was headed by one of his four main disciples, who each continues the Vedanta Sampradaya.

Yet, according to Pandey, these Mathas were not established by Shankara himself, but were originally ashrams established by Vibhūndaka and his son Rṣyaśringa.<sup>[136]</sup> Shankara inherited the ashrams at Dvārakā and Sringeri, and shifted the ashram at Śṛngaverapura to Badarikāśrama, and the ashram at Angadeśa to Jagannātha Puri.<sup>[137]</sup>

Monks of these ten orders differ in part in their beliefs and practices, and a section of them is not considered to be restricted to specific changes made by Shankara. While the dasanāmis associated with the Sankara maths follow the procedures enumerated by Adi Śankara, some of these orders remained partly or fully independent in their belief and practices; and outside the official control of the Sankara maths.

The advaita sampradaya is not a Saiva sect,<sup>[web 1][138]</sup> despite the historical links with Shaivism:

Advaitins are non-sectarian, and they advocate worship of Siva and Visnu equally with that of the other deities of Hinduism, like Sakti, Ganapati and others.<sup>[web 1]</sup>

Nevertheless, contemporary Sankaracaryas have more influence among Saiva communities than among Vaisnava communities.<sup>[web 1]</sup> The greatest influence of the gurus of the advaita tradition has been among followers of the Smartha Tradition, who integrate the domestic Vedic ritual with devotional aspects of Hinduism.<sup>[web 1]</sup>

According to Nakamura, these mathas contributed to the influence of Shankara, which was "due to institutional factors".<sup>[81]</sup> The mathas which he built exist until today, and preserve the teachings and influence of Shankara, "while the writings of other scholars before him came to be forgotten with the passage of time".<sup>[139]</sup>

The table below gives an overview of the four Amnaya Mathas founded by Adi Shankara, and their details.<sup>[web 2]</sup>

<u>Shishya</u> (lineage)	<u>Direction</u>	<u>Maṭha</u>	<u>Mahāvākyā</u>	<u>Veda</u>	<u>Sampradaya</u>
<u>Padmapāda</u>	<b>East</b>	<u>Govardhana Pīṭham</u>	Prajñānam brahma (Consciousness is Brahman)	<u>Rig Veda</u>	Bhogavala
<u>Sureśvara</u>	<b>South</b>	<u>Sringeri Śāradā Pīṭham</u>	Aham brahmāsmi (I am Brahman)	<u>Yajur Veda</u>	Bhūrivala
<u>Hastāmalakācārya</u>	<b>West</b>	<u>Dvāraka Pīṭham</u>	Tattvamasi (That thou art)	<u>Sama Veda</u>	Kitavala
<u>Toṭakācārya</u>	<b>North</b>	<u>Jyotirmatḥa Pīṭham</u>	Ayamātmā brahma (This Atman is Brahman)	<u>Atharva Veda</u>	Nandavala

According to the tradition in Kerala, after Sankara's samadhi at Vadakkunnathan Temple, his disciples founded four mathas in Thrissur city, namely Edayil Madhom, Naduvil Madhom, Thekke Madhom and Vadakke Madhom

## Smarta Tradition

Traditionally, Shankara is regarded as the greatest teacher<sup>[140][141]</sup> and reformer of the Smarta.<sup>[142][141]</sup>

According to Alf Hiltebeitel, Shankara established the nondualist interpretation of the Upanishads as the touchstone of a revived *smarta* tradition:

Practically, Shankara fostered a rapprochement between Advaita and *smarta* orthodoxy, which by his time had not only continued to defend the *varnasramadharma* theory as defining the path of *karman*, but had developed the practice of *pancayatanapuja* ("five-shrine worship") as a solution to varied and conflicting devotional practices. Thus one could worship any one of five deities (Vishnu, Siva, Durga, Surya, Ganesa) as one's *istadevata* ("deity of choice").<sup>[143]</sup>

## Film

- In 1977 Jagadguru Aadisankaran a Malayalam film directed by P. Bhaskaran was released in which Murali Mohan plays the role of Adult Aadi Sankaran and Master Raghu plays childhood.
- In 1983 a film directed by G. V. Iyer named Adi Shankaracharya was premiered, the first film ever made entirely in Sanskrit language in which all of Adi Shankaracharya's works were compiled.<sup>[144]</sup> The movie received the Indian National Film Awards for Best Film, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography and Best Audiology.<sup>[145][146]</sup>
- In 2013, a film Sri Jagadguru Aadi Sankara directed by J. K. Bharavi in Telugu Language was completed and released.

## See also

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Adi Shri Gauḍapādāchārya</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Advaita</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Brahman</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Jnana Yoga</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Upanishads</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Sannyasa</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Shri Gaudapadacharya Mutt</u></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Shri Govinda Bhagavatpadacharya</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Vairagya</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Vivekachudamani</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Soundarya Lahari</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Shivananda Lahari</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Self-consciousness (Vedanta)</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Sringeri Sharada Peetham Shringeri</u> (An Advaita monastery)</li> </ul> |
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## Notes

1. Modern scholarship places Shankara in the earlier part of the 8th century CE (c. 700–750).<sup>[3]</sup> Earlier generations of scholars proposed 788–820 CE.<sup>[3]</sup> Other proposals are 686–718 CE,<sup>[4]</sup> 44 BCE,<sup>[4]</sup> or as early as 509–477 BCE.<sup>[5]</sup>

2. Swami Vivekananda translates *Shivoham*, *Shivohamas* "I am he, I am he"<sup>[79]</sup>
3. Brahman is not to be confused with the personalised godhead Brahma
4. Shankara (?): "(...) Lokayatikas and Bauddhas who assert that the soul does not exist. There are four sects among the followers of Buddha: 1. Madhyamicas who maintain all is void; 2. ñgacharas, who assert except sensation and intelligence all else is void; 3. Sautranticas, who affirm actual existence of external objects no less than of internal sensations; 4. Vaibhashikas, who agree with later (Sautranticas) except that they contend for immediate apprehension of exterior objects through images or forms represented to the intellect."<sup>[12]</sup>
5. Shcherbatsky: "Shankara accuses them of disregarding all logic and refuses to enter in a controversy with them. The position of Shankara is interesting because, at heart, he is in full agreement with the Madhyamikas, at least in the main lines, since both maintain the reality of the One-without-a-second, and the mirage of the manifold. But Shankara, as an ardent hater of Buddhism, could never confess that. He therefore treats the Madhyamika with great contempt [...] on the charge that the Madhyamika denies the possibility of cognizing the Absolute by logical methods (pramaṇa). Vachaspati Mishra in the Bhāmatī rightly interprets this point as referring to the opinion of the Madhyamikas that logic is incapable to solve the question about what existence or non-existence really are. This opinion Shankara himself, as is well known, shares. He does not accept the authority of logic as a means of cognizing the Absolute, but he deems it a privilege of the Vedāntin to fare without logic, since he has Revelation to fall back upon. From all his opponents, he requires strict logical methods."<sup>[94]</sup>

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5. "(53) Chronological chart of the history of Bharatavarsh since its origination<http://encyclopediaofauthentichinduism.org/articles/53.3.htm>) *Encyclopedia of Authentic Hinduism* This site claims to integrate characters from the epics into a continuous chronology They present the list of Dwarka and Kanchi Acharyas, along with their putative dates.
6. Johannes de Kruijf and Ajaya Sahoo (2014), Indian Transnationalism Online: New Perspectives on Diaspora, ISBN 978-1-4724-1913-2 page 105, Quote: "In other words, according to Adi Shankara's argument, the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta stood over and above all other forms of Hinduism and encapsulated them. This then united Hinduism; (...) Another of Adi Shankara's important undertakings which contributed to the unification of Hinduism was his founding of a number of monastic centers."
7. Shankara, Student's Encyclopedia Britannia - India (2000), Volume 4, Encyclopaedia Britannica (UK) Publishing, ISBN 978-0-85229-760-5 page 379, Quote: "Shankaracharya, philosopher and theologian, most renowned exponent of the Advaita Vedānta school of philosophy, from whose doctrines the main currents of modern Indian thought are derived." David Crystal (2004), The Penguin Encyclopedia, Penguin Books, page 135 Quote: "[Shankara] is the most famous exponent of Advaita Vedānta school of Hindu philosophy and the source of the main currents of modern Hindu thought."
8. Christophe Jaffrelot (1998), The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India, Columbia University Press ISBN 978-0-231-10335-0, page 2, Quote: "The main current of Hinduism - if not the only one - which became formalized in a way that approximates to an ecclesiastical structure was that of Shankara".
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Steven Collins (1994), Religion and Practical Reason (Editors: Frank Reynolds, David Tracy), State Univ of New York Press, [ISBN 978-0-7914-2217-5](#) page 64; Quote: "Central to Buddhist soteriology is the doctrine of not-self (Pali: anattā, Sanskrit: anātman, the opposed doctrine of ātman is central to Brahmanical thought). Put very briefly this is the [Buddhist] doctrine that human beings have no soul, no self, no unchanging essence.";  
Edward Roer (Translator), *Shankara's Introduction*(<https://books.google.com/books?id=3uwDAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA2>), p. 2, at [Google Books](#) pages 2–4  
Katie Javanaud (2013), [Is The Buddhist 'No-Self' Doctrine Compatible With Pursuing Nirvana?](#) ([https://philosophynow.org/issues/97/Is\\_The\\_Buddhist\\_No-Self Doctrine\\_Compatible\\_With\\_Pursuing\\_Nirvana](https://philosophynow.org/issues/97/Is_The_Buddhist_No-Self Doctrine_Compatible_With_Pursuing_Nirvana)) Philosophy Now;
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Elsewhere, Shankara's *Bhāṣya* on various Upanishads repeat "give up rituals and rites", see for example Shankara's Bhāṣya on Brihadaranyaka Upanishad(<https://archive.org/stream/Brihadaranyaka.Upanishad.Shankara.Bhashya.bySwami.Madhavananda#page/n375/mode/2up>) pages 348–350, 754–757
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